

A Brief Report on Torture and Ill-treatment

February, 2002

I. Introduction

MAKE THE WORLD A TORTURE FREE ZONE.

These words were expressed in a small pamphlet published by Amnesty International. In Article 1 of United Nations Convention Against Torture states that "For the purposes of this Convention, the term 'Torture' means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions."

In the Report 2001 of Amnesty International, the situation of political prisoners in prisons of Burma was stated clearly. It said "Torture and ill-treatment of political prisoners continued to be reported. Methods of torture included severe beatings and kicks with boots; an iron bar being rolled repeatedly up and down the shins until the skin peeled off; near-suffocation; and "the airplane", where prisoners are suspended from the ceiling, spun around and beaten.

Above mentioned phrases obviously described the current situation of torture and ill-treatment in the prisons and interrogation centers of Burma military regime. Those also show the way how the int'l community can do for nearly 50 million people of Burma, who are still being in suffer more than four decades.

We have tried our best to disclose the real situation of Torture and ill-treatment, which have been using by successive military regimes throughout the years, in this report.

II. Interrogation Centers

(a) Situation

The military intelligence service (MIS) of SPDC use the interrogation centers to obtain information from the persons, whom they suspect as he/she involved in any political movement. By this mean the MIS uses all methods like severe beatings, kicks with boots, suffocating, threatening with snakes, interrogating throughout the time without allowing any rest and without supplying proper food and drinking water just name a few.

The MIS eventually uses the methods which can strongly attack the intended person's mental, whom they are interrogating. For instance, they make some noises like shouting of severe pain from a room, which is nearby the intended person's room. When the intended person hears those shouting, he assumes those are his colleagues. In this case he feels heavier in sorrow than in anger. At last he losses his ability to control his mental power to face the interrogating.

(b) Experiences

Since 1988, there were many students, monks, ethnic group members, opposition parties' members and even ordinary people were arrested and interrogated using torture methods by MIS. Each arrested person has same experience with other and unique experience of oneself.

A former political prisoner recalled some incidents when he was in MIS's interrogation center. The MIS asked his opinion on Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein. They forced him to admit by questioning that Saddam Hussein got the support from the Iraqi people, his army was very strong and so he could challenge the United States. Simultaneously, the MIS wanted to prove why the military regime is trying to build up a strong army in Burma. '1

One female student from Bassein Township uncovered her experience at a cruel MIS interrogation center in Bassein. They put her in a dark cell for nearly a month. Her interrogator threw something hard to her face and her upper lip swelled. The MIS officers slapped and punched her many times. They threatened her virginity, which made her more terrify than beatings. She got sickness after a few days and when asked for some medicine, the MIS officers laughed and asked her that, "What fever is that? Love sickness?". At last they gave her medicine. But they asked her what medicine she took and they by themselves answered that it can heighten her sexuality. 2

Another female student got different experience at MIS interrogation center in Rangoon. They told her clearly that they had the right to do whatever they wanted to do and they were above the law, nobody had the right to accuse them of anything. They forced her to squat and stand continuously with her arms raised in the air. Because of the intense pain of squatting and standing, she had tried to stop. Whenever she had to stop the MIS officers hit her with a cane stick across her lips and on he nipples. They threatened her that if she did not tell the truth, they would remove her sarong. When she told her interrogators she couldn't stand anymore, they laughed and beaten severely with a cane stick across her back. They kicked her with heavy military boots until unconscious even she did not know if her sarong was still properly fastened. At last at that point she thought she would never leave here alive.3

Above mentioned real life stories are just a few. There are a lot of other's experiences of notorious and brutal military regime's MIS interrogation centers.

III. Prisons

(a) Situation

After interrogating period, the persons whom the MIS assumed those took part in a political movement against military regime or those strongly believe in democracy and human rights, were sent to the military courts and sentenced long prison terms with hard labor.

Actually, the prisons are one kind of interrogation centers other than correction centers. And one more important fact is that ever staff level from Department of Prisons do inhuman and degrading treatment to prisoners.

We have to appreciate the prisons' conditions improve more than before after the visit of United Nations Special Envoy for Human Rights and the ICRC. But we have to express the true condition while not being those Envoy and organizations.

We noted that a saying of one student political prisoner in Myingyan prison. When his brother came to meet him and asked if any improvement after the ICRC's visit to the prison, he replied that the bed was six feet higher than before and nothing else.

We should not forget the behavior of military dictatorship. We have to accept the real improvement and we have to notice that there are hindrances.

(b) Experiences

Before the ICRC and United Nations Envoys got the chance to visit prisons, there were a lot of brutal actions of prisons' officials to political prisoners.

A former political prisoner, who was once a history professor of Rangoon University, remarked that, "Burmese prison life is the worst in the world". This saying is well enough to express prison experience. "Many political prisoners have died in jails in Burma", he added. Once he and other political prisoners protested the conditions at Insein Central Jail, the prison officials pulled him out of his cell and beat. They kicked him repeatedly and hit with a rubber pipe. At least one rib was cracked possibly more.

Then he was blindfolded and tied to a chain in an upright position for three straight days. He received an injection in the back of his neck. To this day he did not know what he was given. It made him dizzy. If he appeared to be falling to sleep, a guard hit him. 4

Many former political prisoners later claimed that they were forced to crawl through the sharp stones and along the way the prisons officials beat them.

Another political prisoner spoke about one of his experience in Thayet prison. Once he was in confinement cell and the Deputy Director-General of Department of Prisons came to visit the prison. At that time there were about ten political prisoners at that confinement cell. When he checked the cell, he ordered to Chief Prison Officer, "Put them all at the confinement cell throughout their imprisonment. Don't let them to walk outside cell room. Let them only once a day to bathe. Don't lit the light in their room, only from outside. So they have to suffer everyday and they will afraid of us".

We cannot say those conditions are totally change now and the prisons are the most appropriate situation now. Even the ICRC and United Nations Envoy eventually monitor the prisons, the conditions are still bad. The food, clothes, sanitary system, healthcare are good only at the day those Envoy and organization came to monitor the prisons. Just after they left the prisons, all the conditions were normal as before.

IV. Physical and Mental state of former Political Prisoners

Because of the torture methods used by the MIS interrogators, all political prisoners suffer at least one kind of physical and mental illness.

A number of political prisoners are still suffering paralyses and some kind of heart diseases. We have found some persons who are not in normal mental state after their interrogating period. Some accused firmly that they cannot recall their memory about some happenings before prison period and the name of their families friends and relatives.

One student political prisoner died years after his release. His doctors proved he was infected HIV. He was a simple person who has never drunk and never gone to prostitutes' house. His family recalled he was once injected in Insein prison hospital with common syringe. The prisons' hospitals have never used the disposable syringe. No one can know how many persons have been infected HIV/AIDS through prisons' hospitals. Why we could not say this is the indirect method of torture?

V. Conclusion

In today's civilized world, the acts of torture should not exist anymore. It is not the duty of a single society but the whole; every human being of the global village. Like AIDS, it also can knock everyone's door, can reach everyone's bedroom and, of course, everyone's daily life.

As long as any type of dictatorship exist, this ways of torturing happen more and more.

The most important fact is that we should not hope a lot from a military dictatorship regime. All we can get from them is that they believe which cannot threaten their existence.

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End notes:

1. A Dialogue With the Devil by Moe Aye; Tortured Voices, Personal Accounts of Burma's Interrogation Centers; Published by the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF); July 1998
2. My Interrogation by Ma Tin Tin Maw, Tortured Voices, Personal Accounts of Burma's Interrogation Centers; Published by the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF); July 1998
3. At the Mercy of the Beast by Ma Su Su Mon; Tortured Voices, Personal Accounts of Burma's Interrogation Centers; Published by the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF); July 1998
4. Exile from Rangoon, Burmese Academic and Dissident, Fled Brutal Military Rule of Homeland by Doug Blackburn(Staff Writer for Times Union); Spirit for Survival; Published by Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma);